OTTERY ST MARY TOWN COUNCIL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) POLICY

Version	Author	Details	Dates created	Date approved & ref
1	Laura Dickinson	Created and adopted	October 2026	02/11/2026 C/26/11/030

1. Introduction

1.1 The Council is committed to delivering the best possible services to its residents and embracing innovation. It recognises the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance efficiency, productivity, creativity and informed decision-making across its operations. This policy has been written to provide a clear and responsible framework for the use of AI, ensuring that it complements the Council's existing information governance and security policies while upholding its legal and ethical obligations.

1.2 This policy provides a clear framework for the safe, effective and ethical use of AI within the Council. It sets out the guidelines to enable employees, councillors and others covered by this policy to responsibly harness the benefits of AI while mitigating associated risks. By following this policy, all persons covered will understand the principles for using AI lawfully and ethically, protecting data, and remaining accountable for outcomes. In addition, those covered by this policy will be expected to follow appropriate review processes to identify and address inaccuracies, bias and other risks associated with AI use.

1.3 At the date of adoption, the Council's approved AI-enabled systems include Microsoft Copilot, Gov.Meetings and NORA. This list is indicative only and may be amended without requiring a formal amendment to this policy. Users must not use unapproved AI systems for Council business without prior approval from the Town Clerk or other authorised officer.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all information processed by the Council or its representatives. This includes all Council employees, elected members, contractors, volunteers, and third parties working for or on behalf of the Council.

2.2 This policy applies to the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in connection with Council business and the handling of Council information. It covers standalone AI systems, applications and tools, as well as AI features and functionality incorporated within software,

platforms and services used by the Council. The policy applies regardless of whether AI is accessed through Council-owned devices or approved personal devices used for Council business.

3. Definitions

3.1 Artificial Intelligence (AI): Technology that performs tasks which would normally require human intelligence, such as generating content, analysing information, recognising patterns, making recommendations or supporting decision-making. AI may be used as a standalone tool or incorporated into other software and systems used by the Council.

3.2 Generative AI: A type of Artificial Intelligence that can create new content in response to user prompts, including text, images, audio, video, summaries and other materials. Examples include AI tools used to assist with drafting documents, emails, reports and communications.

3.3 Automated Decision-Making AI: A type of Artificial Intelligence that makes or significantly influences decisions, recommendations or assessments with limited or no human involvement. This may include systems used to rank, score, categorise or recommend outcomes relating to individuals, applications, services or business processes.

4. Principles

4.1 The Council is committed to using AI in a responsible, lawful and transparent manner. Any use of AI must support the Council's values, duties and objectives and comply with relevant legislation, including data protection and equality requirements.

4.2 AI may be used to support research, administration, communication, analysis and other Council activities where it provides a clear benefit. The Council encourages innovation and the responsible use of technology to improve efficiency and service delivery.

4.3 AI must be used with appropriate human oversight. Responsibility for decisions, actions and published content remains with the employee, councillor or other individual using the AI system and must not be delegated to AI.

4.4 Information entered into, or generated by, AI systems must be handled securely and in accordance with the Council's data protection, information governance and cybersecurity requirements.

4.5 AI-generated content must be reviewed and verified before it is relied upon or published. Users must take reasonable steps to ensure information is accurate, appropriate and free from bias or other errors.

4.6 The Council will seek to ensure that AI is used fairly, ethically and transparently, and that its use does not unlawfully discriminate against, disadvantage or exclude any individual or group.

5. Acceptable Use of AI

5.1 The Council recognises that AI can support the delivery of services, improve efficiency and enhance productivity. Employees, councillors and others covered by this policy may use approved AI tools and functionality for legitimate Council purposes, provided such use complies with this policy and all other relevant Council policies and procedures.

5.2 Examples of acceptable use include, but are not limited to:

- Drafting correspondence, reports, policies and other documents;
- Summarising information, documents, legislation or meeting notes;
- Improving the clarity, readability or presentation of written content;
- Assisting with research and information gathering;
- Supporting the preparation of communications, newsletters, website content and social media content;
- Assisting with administrative tasks and workflow management;
- Producing meeting transcripts, notes or summaries;
- Analysing information to support officers and councillors in carrying out their duties.

5.3 AI may be used to support and inform decision-making processes where appropriate. However, AI outputs must be treated as advisory only and must not replace professional judgement, officer recommendations, member consideration or formal Council decision-making processes.

5.4 Users must review and verify AI-generated content before it is used, shared, published or relied upon in the course of Council business. Responsibility for the accuracy, appropriateness and legality of any content remains with the individual using the AI system.

5.5 Where images created by or on behalf of the Council have been generated wholly or substantially using AI, and are published or shared by the Council, they must be clearly identified as AI-generated.

6. Restricted and Prohibited Use

6.1 The use of AI must not compromise the Council's legal, regulatory, ethical or operational responsibilities. Users must ensure that AI is used appropriately and within the limitations set out in this policy.

6.2 Confidential, sensitive or personal information must not be entered into public or unapproved AI systems where doing so would breach data protection legislation, confidentiality obligations or Council policies.

6.3 AI must not be used as the sole basis for decisions affecting individuals, including but not limited to:

- Recruitment and employment matters;
- Grant applications;
- Procurement processes;
- Complaints or enforcement matters;
- Access to Council services;
- Any matter involving the exercise of statutory powers or duties.

6.4 AI-generated content must not be presented as verified fact without appropriate review and verification. Users must not knowingly rely upon or distribute information that they know, or reasonably suspect, to be inaccurate, misleading or incomplete.

6.5 AI must not be used to generate content that is unlawful, discriminatory, offensive, misleading, defamatory or otherwise inconsistent with the Council's values, policies or legal obligations.

6.6 Users must not seek to bypass Council policies, security controls, approval processes or professional standards through the use of AI.

7. Data Protection and Information Security

7.1 The use of AI must comply with all applicable legislation, including UK data protection legislation, and with the Council's information governance, confidentiality and cybersecurity requirements.

7.2 Users must consider the nature and sensitivity of information before entering it into any AI system. Personal data, special category data, confidential information or commercially sensitive information must only be processed using approved AI tools and in accordance with Council policies and procedures.

7.3 Information entered into AI systems should be limited to that which is necessary for the task being undertaken. Where possible, information should be anonymised or redacted before being used with AI tools.

7.4 Users must not enter confidential or personal information into public AI tools where doing so could result in unauthorised access, disclosure, retention or use of that information.

7.5 Any actual or suspected data breach, information security incident or inappropriate use of AI must be reported in accordance with the Council's existing reporting procedures.

7.6 Where the Council proposes to introduce a new AI system or functionality or significantly change how AI is used within Council activities, appropriate assessments and approvals must be completed before implementation.

8. Accuracy and Verification

8.1 AI systems can produce inaccurate, incomplete, outdated or misleading information. Users must exercise judgement and critically assess all AI-generated content before relying upon, sharing or publishing it.

8.2 AI-generated content must be reviewed for accuracy, relevance, appropriateness and consistency with Council policies, procedures and legal obligations.

8.3 Where AI is used to assist with research, summaries, reports, correspondence or other Council documents, users must take reasonable steps to verify factual information, references, quotations, legislation, guidance and other material upon which decisions or actions may be based.

8.4 Particular care must be taken when using AI-generated information in relation to legal, financial, regulatory, employment, planning, cemetery administration or other matters where inaccuracies could result in harm, financial loss, reputational damage or non-compliance with legal obligations.

8.5 The use of AI does not remove or reduce individual responsibility for the accuracy of information. Responsibility for any content used, shared or published by the Council remains with the employee, councillor or other individual relying upon that information.

9. Human Oversight, Accountability and Decision-Making

9.1 The Council recognises that AI can assist with research, analysis, administration and the preparation of information. However, AI is intended to support human judgement and must not replace it.

9.2 Appropriate human oversight must be maintained whenever AI is used in connection with Council business. Users remain responsible for reviewing, considering and approving any information, recommendations or content produced with the assistance of AI.

9.3 Responsibility for decisions made by or on behalf of the Council remains with the relevant employee, councillor, committee or delegated decision-maker. The use of AI does not remove or reduce individual accountability for decisions, actions or outcomes.

9.4 AI-generated outputs, recommendations or assessments must be treated as advisory and must not be relied upon as the sole basis for decisions, particularly where those decisions may affect individuals, Council services, finances, assets or statutory responsibilities.

9.5 The Council will not permit AI systems to make decisions on behalf of the Council without appropriate human involvement, oversight and authority.

10. Governance

10.1 The Council will ensure that the use of AI is subject to appropriate oversight and governance arrangements. Any use of AI must be consistent with the Council's policies, procedures, legal obligations and values.

10.2 The Town Clerk shall be responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy and providing guidance where required on the appropriate use of AI within Council activities.

10.3 Users are responsible for complying with its requirements and for seeking advice where they are unsure whether a particular use of AI is appropriate.

10.4 Any proposal to introduce a new AI system, enhanced AI functionality, or to significantly change the way AI is used within Council activities must be considered and approved through the Council's existing governance arrangements before implementation.
10.5 Where appropriate, the Council will consider legal, financial, operational, information governance, equality and reputational risks before adopting new AI systems or functionality.

10.5 Any records, documents or information generated through the use of AI that form part of Council business shall be retained, managed and disposed of in accordance with the Council's records management and retention policies.

10.6 Users must consider copyright, intellectual property and licensing requirements when using AI systems, AI-generated content should not be assumed to be free from copyright restrictions and must be reviewed before publication or wider distribution.

11. Ethical Use

11.1 The Council is committed to the ethical, responsible and transparent use of AI. AI must be used in a manner that supports the Council's values, maintains public trust and complies with applicable legislation, policies and professional standards.

11.2 When using AI, users must consider the potential impact of AI-generated outputs on individuals, communities and Council decision-making. AI should be used in a way that promotes fairness, inclusivity and equal treatment.

11.3 AI must not be used to generate content that is unlawful, discriminatory, misleading, offensive, defamatory or otherwise inconsistent with the Council's values and responsibilities.

11.4 Users should be mindful that AI systems may reflect biases present in the data on which they have been trained. Where appropriate, AI-generated content should be reviewed to identify and address potential bias, inaccuracies or unintended consequences.

11.5 AI should be used as a tool to support human judgement and professional expertise. The Council will not use AI in a manner that removes appropriate human involvement from decisions where ethical, legal or professional discretion is required.

11.6 Where there is uncertainty about the ethical implications of a proposed use of AI, guidance should be sought through the Council's existing management and governance arrangements before proceeding.

12. Training and Awareness

12.1 The Council is committed to supporting employees, councillors and others covered by this policy in the responsible and effective use of AI.

12.2 Those covered by this policy should familiarise themselves with the requirements of this policy and any other relevant Council policies relating to data protection, information governance, cybersecurity and acceptable use of technology.

12.3 Where appropriate, the Council may provide training, guidance or other resources to support the safe and effective use of AI and to promote awareness of the opportunities and risks associated with its use.

12.4 Users are encouraged to seek guidance where they are uncertain about the appropriate use of AI or the suitability of a particular AI tool or application for Council purposes.

12.5 The Council will seek to maintain awareness of developments in AI technology and associated legal, regulatory and ethical considerations to ensure its approach remains proportionate and up to date.

13. Monitoring and Review

13.1 The Council will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this policy and may take appropriate action where misuse of AI is identified.

13.2 Users are encouraged to report any concerns regarding the use of AI, including issues relating to accuracy, data protection, information security, bias, or inappropriate use.

13.3 The Council will periodically review its use of AI and associated governance arrangements to ensure they remain appropriate, proportionate and aligned with the Council's operational needs, legal obligations and strategic objectives.

13.4 This policy will be reviewed every year, or sooner where required by legislative, regulatory, technological or operational changes.